

**Public Safety Committee
Tuesday, December 12, 2023
Remote via Zoom
Burlington, Vermont
APPROVED MINUTES**

Members Present: Karen Paul (Chair), Melo Grant, Tim Doherty

Staff Present: Kristen Kaichen (Legal Administrative Assistant), Sarah Hernandez Timm (Public Information & Community Engagement Officer)

Public Present: Tim Williams, Kelly Devine, Colin Hilliard

Meeting called to order at 5:34 PM by President Paul.

**1. Adopt the Agenda
1.01 Adopt the Agenda**

Motion to Adopt Agenda as written.

Motion by Councilor Grant, Seconded by Councilor Doherty

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

**2. Public Forum
2.01 Verbal Comments**

No public comment. Public Forum closed at 5:36 PM.

**3. Review Agenda for Community Forums
3.01 Review Agenda for Community Forums**

President Paul reviewed the structure and elements of the upcoming community forums taking place on December 14 and December 19, 2023:

- The City's website would run a banner at the top of the home page, which links to a page where the public can submit questions ahead of time. As of December 12, at least 50 questions had been submitted online.
- All speakers requested per the Public Safety Committee's resolution, which was passed by the City Council on October 10, 2023, had been invited and that a number of responses had been received from the Burlington House Delegation and senators representing Burlington.

- Speakers' presentations would be no more than 25 minutes and the remaining time of the 2-hr forums would be dedicated to the public's questions and ideas.
- How the forums and speakers were being introduced was unclear. How presentations were being submitted and their current status was also unknown.
- Each forum would be live-streamed and have a recording made available online.
- State's Attorney Sarah George and Chief Jon Murad would be present at both community forums, and both are scheduled to speak at the community forum on December 19.

Councilor Grant expressed concerns and provided feedback on the format of the forums, stating that while appreciative legislative representatives would be present, Councilor Grant worries this will not unite representatives in the way the initial idea for the forums had intended, especially since the public's role would be asking questions and suggesting ideas rather than directly sharing their everyday experiences. Councilor Grant also thought members of the Committee should have a chance to speak at the forums.

Councilor Grant also noted it may be beneficial for the Committee to obtain a list of all the questions, and for the legislature to have a copy as well, so that they may pursue as a Committee any unaddressed questions. Councilor Grant mentioned having specific questions related to the transparency of data from Burlington Police Department and how citizens can be informed about when cases reach State's Attorney Sarah George's office.

Councilor Grant asked Community Engagement Officer Sarah Hernandez Timm to follow up on the status of a comprehensive list of BPD phone numbers that would be posted to BPD's webpage for the public to reference in cases where the phone tree is not working.

Councilor Doherty agreed with Councilor Grant's statements about misinformation and misunderstanding in the community regarding public safety and law enforcement and stated the forums would be a valuable opportunity for members of the public to hear from experts, learn about their work, and how they work. Councilor Doherty also noted it would be valuable for the Committee to better identify what the Committee can move to change going forward.

Councilor Doherty also asked President Paul about a past charter change's history that would have enabled Burlington to restrict firearms within City limits, suggesting this may be an initiative the Committee could pursue after the forums. President Paul recalled that it was former Councilor Norm Blais who brought it forward around 2014, but it died in Montpelier. President Paul added Senator Phil Baruth has attempted reviving it a few times since. Councilor Grant expressed support for this initiative, especially as it relates to regulating firearms in bars, and noted gun violence is not only rising in Burlington but in Vermont as a whole.

The Committee discussed future priorities for meetings after the forums, during which Councilor Grant suggested the Committee keep a running list of the Committee's open issues, such as dispatch issues, Chittenden County updates, BPD and BFD updates, and Burlington CARES. President Paul added that the Administration is expected to come back to the City Council with a new plan for Burlington CARES, as the program will run out of funding by March 2024. President Paul mentioned this could be an item the Committee brings forward in February.

Relating back to the community forums, Councilor Doherty said one question the Committee could pose to ATF or the US Attorney at the first community forum on December 14 is whether they are currently doing something similar to heat maps, such as BFD's heat maps for Burlington CARES, with respect to prioritizing repeat distribution drug houses. Another question could be thinking about the use of the federal laws to pressure landlords.

The Committee's next meeting will be December 21. The Committee agreed to discuss future meeting dates for the new year offline.

4. Adjournment

4.01 Motion to Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned with no objection by President Paul at 6:27 PM.